

ST. MARK'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
POLICY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CHILD ABUSE

Introduction

We, the congregation and staff at St. Mark's United Methodist Church, have been entrusted with a very precious gift: our children and youth. We have a divine mandate to nurture God's children and youth, including doing our best to see that they receive no physical or emotional harm while in our care.

We have a responsibility to our families to assure them that their children will be safe in our care, knowing that victimization of a child would devastate both the child and family for years.

We have a responsibility to our volunteers, staff, and church leaders to provide guidance for recognizing, avoiding, and preventing child abuse. We have a responsibility to protect them from unfounded accusations that would result in financial damages, destroy their reputation, and ruin their lives.

We have a responsibility to our church community to offer as safe an environment as possible. We would be challenged to maintain our community if our mutual trust and respect is tested by accusations of child abuse, whether real or fabricated. We would be challenged to maintain our community in the face of the financial, legal and interpersonal stresses resulting from an accusation of child abuse. We would be challenged to maintain our witness and mission to the surrounding community after an allegation of child abuse.

We have developed the following policy for the prevention of child abuse to ensure that we do our best to provide a sacred and safe environment for all (children, families, congregation, staff, volunteers, and leaders) who participate in St. Mark's programs and are a part of our community.

- I. Screening procedures for the staff and volunteers of St. Mark's who will be working with children and youth are described.
 - A. People who are expected to have repeated contact with children and youth will be subject to screening.
 1. All staff members who are 18 years of age and older will be screened.
 2. Volunteers who are 18 years of age and older and who also work with children and youth (for example, Sunday School teachers, Vacation Bible School teachers, choir directors, chaperones on overnight trips, youth counselors and babysitters) will be screened.
 3. The following people are not subject to the screening procedures described in this document.
 - a. St. Mark's Nash Neighbors volunteers, because they are regulated by the procedures of the Amphi school district.
 - b. The employees of the Early Childhood Center because they are regulated by state law.
 4. The chair and vice-chair of the Trustees, because of their role on the Board of Directors for the Early Childhood Center, are required by the State Department of Health to be fingerprinted. They will be informed of this requirement before accepting their assignment to the committee.
 - B. The information required for the screening procedures will be gathered by the staff of St. Mark's.
 - C. St. Mark's will use a commercial service to discover if the individual has a criminal record or other evidence of any sex offenses. Fingerprinting will be used if there is a discrepancy in the records supplied by the service. If the report shows that there was a conviction of child abuse, domestic abuse, a sexual crime or felony, the individual will not be allowed to work with children. (However, we will work to help them find another role within the church.) Driving offenses that show up in the individual's record will prevent them from chauffeuring until that information is removed from their driving record.
 - D. References will be checked by the staff member of St. Mark's affiliated with that program area.
 - E. Informing staff, volunteers and congregation about the screening policy and verifying that the screening policy is being followed is necessary for the success of such a policy.
 1. Staff will receive a copy of the policy, sign an agreement to the policy, and pass the screening requirement before they can begin work. This procedure will be repeated every year for continuing staff.
 2. Volunteers as described in I.A.2 will be given a copy of the policy, sign an agreement to the policy, and pass the screening requirement before they can

- begin their service. The background check will be repeated every year.
3. Both staff and volunteers will also need to complete training with respect to the policy and procedures before beginning their work with children and youth.
 4. If anyone does not pass the screening procedures, they will be referred to the Staff Parish Relations Committee and given the opportunity to contest the findings of the report. If the individual is clergy the information will be given to the District Superintendent.
 5. The policy will be posted on the website.
 6. Verification that the policy is being carried out will be done twice yearly by a three-person team including one lay leader; the chairperson from Staff Parish Relations OR Trustees OR Covenant Council; and the business manager. The verification team will look for the paperwork verifying that the background check was done, references were checked, CPR training (when required) was done, the agreement to the policy was signed, and emergency contact information and permission slips are on file for all children and youth (see II.A.1 and II.A.2).
- F. St. Mark's recognizes that maintaining confidentiality and keeping personal information secure is very important. Therefore, the following procedures will be followed for the gathering and storage of the information.
1. After the information is gathered and the commercial screening company has given their report, the social security number will be blacked out on the forms.
 2. Information will not be shared with others except by permission or if subpoenaed.
 3. The only person at St. Mark's who will see the social security number will be the business manager who performs the security check. The only people who see the rest of the information will be the verification team.
 4. The paperwork will be stored in the same manner as other sensitive materials are stored.
- II. Proper screening procedures are only part of the challenge for keeping our children and youth safe. Therefore, the following procedures will be followed for all activities with children and youth.
- A. These procedures are to be followed with both children and youth:
1. Permission slips for all trips need to be filled out in advance by parents or legal guardians.
 2. Emergency contact information needs to be on file for all children and youth.

3. If children were dropped off for an activity, the adult supervisor does not leave until all children have been picked up. If someone other than a parent is to pick up a child, there needs to be a signed slip from the parent or legal guardian presented to the adult supervisor. If no one shows up, the supervisor calls the numbers on the emergency contact list. If the supervisor is unable to reach anyone on the contact information list, the supervisor will contact the church office (297-2062) and leave a message for the pastors using the "emergency notification" option. One of the pastors will return the call and help to determine which action to take, which might include calling 911. The adult will not wait alone with a single child: there should be at least three people present.
 4. Children and youth need to stay for the entire event until released by the supervisor or picked up by their parent or legal guardian.
 5. All paid staff who work with children and youth will have CPR training.
 6. All chauffeurs need to present a valid driver's license and proof of insurance to the adult in charge of any field trips that are part of a church sponsored activity. They will also be asked to sign an affidavit that they have a clean driving record.
 7. Adults shall not transport a single child or youth, alone, who is not related to the driver. There should be at least three people, including the driver, in the vehicle.
 8. There shall be open sight lines when an adult is speaking one on one with a child or youth.
 9. Jokes, remarks and slogans on attire that pertain to sexuality, race, or violence will not be tolerated.
 10. All doors to classrooms used by children and youth must have windows.
 11. All doors should be unlocked, except at night.
 12. All supervising adults need to know where to find the Rapid Response Guidebook, which will be placed in all rooms where children and youth might gather.
 13. All supervising adults need to be informed about the legal requirements for reporting child abuse.
 14. If a child or youth initiates inappropriate contact, the adult should immediately inform the youth coordinator.
- B. These procedures will be followed when working with children, defined as individuals in 6th grade or younger.
1. Children two years old and younger do not participate in St. Mark's Sunday school programs, but instead are placed in child care. All persons involved in providing child care, whether on Sunday mornings or concurrent with adult activities during other times of the week, will be paid staff members who have received the appropriate training to be working with children. There will be

two staff members present whenever child care is provided. If there are children 1 year old and younger, at least one of the staff members will be 21 years or older.

2. Children in 3rd grade or younger will only be released into the custody of their parents or guardians. Children in 4th through 6th grade will not be released from Sunday school until worship services are over or their parents or guardians pick them up.
3. Two unrelated persons will be present during all activities. At least one of these persons must be 18 years of age or older, and the other person must be five years older than the oldest child present.
4. Unscreened adults, other than parents or guardians, will not be allowed within the gates of the Early Education Center when it is meeting unless accompanied by a member of St. Mark's staff who has been screened.

C. These procedures will be followed when working with youth.

1. An adult is defined as someone who is at least 21 years of age.
2. If there is mixed company during an overnight activity, both sexes shall be represented by the chaperones. In this case, there also needs to be an adult present who is at least 21 years of age and 5 years older than the oldest youth.
3. When on an overnight trip, adults and youth shall have separate shower times or facilities.

III. We hope never to have to respond to allegations of abuse. However, we still need to be prepared to do so. The following are a summary of the guidelines to follow in a case of suspected abuse.

- A. Volunteers and staff who observe a crime against a child will use the "Notification of Abuse" checklist (Appendix D in this document) to ensure that legal (and other) requirements are met in reporting the incident. Completion of the entire checklist will ensure all notifications are made and will also provide a written record of actions taken for use in the investigation.
- B. The "Notification of Abuse" checklist will also be found in the Rapid Response Guidebook (see II.A.12). A copy of the guidebook must be included in a travel pack taken on all St. Mark's field trips or off-site programs conducted with the children and youth.
- C. The Senior Pastor (unless the person accused of the abuse) will temporarily remove the accused from their position (whether volunteer or staff) until the allegations are fully investigated and resolved, and the accused is cleared of the accusation. The Pastor will acknowledge the accused as a person of sacred worth, but our faithful response as a church to all its children requires an environment free from abuse.
- D. The congregation will need to be given the correct information regarding any official investigations, and there may be a need for special ministering for the individuals involved. There may also be a need for interaction with the surrounding community. Without knowing the exact circumstances, it is hard to

describe a specific plan to respond to such a situation. The Staff Parish Relations Committee will be responsible for responding to the congregation and public in a timely manner when circumstances require a response.

- IV. This policy is in effect for all St. Mark's sponsored or affiliated events involving children and youth, to include but not limited to the following: Sunday School classes; Vacation Bible School; evening childcare; service projects; field trips; gatherings in private residences or public places.
- V. This policy shall be reviewed and updated annually by the authority of the Staff Parish Committee in order to keep current with any changes in law or circumstances.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: NOTIFICATION OF ABUSE CHECKLIST

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NOTIFICATION OF ABUSE CHECKLIST

These procedures must be followed for all instances of non-accidental injury, sexual molestation/abuse, death, and/or physical abuse/neglect of a child. Whether you are responding as a "first hand" witness to a crime against a child/youth, are the recipient of an allegation of a crime against a child/youth, or whether you have developed a reasonable suspicion that a crime is occurring outside of St. Mark's against one of our children/youth, you have a legal and moral obligation to report the crime. Following this checklist will ensure all legal and ethical requirements are met.

NOTE: If the victim has sustained injuries, contact 911 first to obtain appropriate medical care. Complete checklist as best you can after victim has been transported for emergency care.

Call 911: Date/Time: _____ Spoke with: _____
Summary of medical care provided: _____
Victim transported to (name of medical facility): _____
Date/Time: _____

1. Name of worker (paid or volunteer) observing or receiving disclosure of a crime against a child/youth: _____
2. Victim's Name: _____
Victim's Age: _____
3. Date/Time of initial conversation with/report from victim: _____
4. Worker's description of incident (whether as a witness to abuse or second-hand report of abuse): _____

5. Worker's description of suspicious marks/injuries on child (color, size and location of bruises, types and location of cuts, etc.): _____

6. Victim's statement (record exactly child's explanation of occurrence): _____

7. Name of person accused of abuse: _____
Relationship to victim (staff, volunteer, family member, etc.) _____

You are required by Arizona State law to verbally report this incident immediately. A follow up, written report will be required within 72 hours.

8. Notify victim's parent/guardian (if not the accused).
 Date/Time of contact: _____; Spoke with: _____
 Summary of discussion: _____

9. Notify CPS (if accused is family member of victim) – CPS, 887-7577
 (Child Abuse Hotline, 888-767-2445)
 Date/Time of contact: _____; Spoke with: _____
 Summary of discussion: _____

10. Notify Pima County Sheriff/Local Law Enforcement Authorities – Pima Co. Sheriff, 547-6311
 Date/Time of contact: _____; Spoke with: _____
 Summary of discussion: _____

11. Notify a St. Mark's UMC Pastor (one will do, try the Senior Pastor first)

 Who contacted: _____; Date/Time: _____
 Summary of discussion: _____

COMPLETE A WRITTEN REPORT – due to proper authorities within 72 hours of incident. Ensure a copy of your completed checklist and written report are provided to the Senior Pastor for storage and use in follow up investigations.

PASTOR'S CHECKLIST

Once a pastor has been notified of a crime against a St. Mark's child/youth, the pastor receiving the notification will complete the following checklist (but only if the alleged abuse occurred at St. Mark's UMC, during a St. Mark's sponsored outing, or if the accused is St. Mark's UMC paid staff or volunteer) within the next business day after initial notification.

1. Notify South District Superintendent.
 Date/Time of contact: _____; Spoke with: _____
 Summary of discussion: _____

2. Notify Desert SW Conference Bishop.
 Date/Time of contact: _____; Spoke with: _____
 Summary of discussion: _____

3. Notify Insurance Agent.
 Date/Time of contact: _____; Spoke with: _____
 Summary of discussion: _____

4. Notify St. Mark's Predesignated Media Team: Chair, Staff Parish Relations Committee; Communications Coordinator.

Pastor must provide exact text of releasable information.

Date/Time of contact: _____; Spoke with: _____
Summary of discussion: _____

5. Notify Parish Lawyer.

Date/Time of contact: _____; Spoke with: _____
Summary of discussion: _____

6. Notify St. Mark's Counselor in Residence.

Date/Time of contact: _____; Spoke with: _____
Summary of discussion: _____

7. Notify Chair, St. Mark's Board of Trustees.

Date/Time of contact: _____; Spoke with: _____
Summary of discussion: _____

8. Notify Chair, St. Mark's Staff Parish Relations Committee.

Date/Time of contact: _____; Spoke with: _____
Summary of discussion: _____

9. Plan notification/ministry to St. Mark's Congregation.

Ensure completed checklist is stored in secure location for use during investigation.